

HS2 work should not just go to multi-nationals say local firms

Construction firms in the West Midlands have said it is vital they get their share of work on the HS2 rail project.

About 600 firms attended a conference in Birmingham on Tuesday about how to bid for contracts on the £40bn project.

HS2 Ltd said contracts would involve everything from tunnelling to building trains, bridges and stations.

Nick Coley, from Fitzgerald Civil Engineering, said he feared contracts would go to multi-nationals and "the usual suspects".

Mr Coley said he was "encouraged" by what he heard at the conference, having been "quite sceptical" when he went.

'More jobs'

"They are keen to get small to medium local companies involved - I think there's a genuine desire to do that," he added.

"My one concern is whether that will happen practically or will the usual suspects, the multi-nationals, get the work?"

The firm he is managing director of is based in Aston, Birmingham, has a turnover of £36M and employs 100 people from the area.

Paul Little is the managing director of MD Cohen Ltd, a small family building business, based in Moseley.

"In terms of the investment they are talking about it can only mean more jobs," he said.

"Even if we don't get the contracts we can backfill behind the people who have gone off to work on the project."

The firm currently employs 36 people, including seven apprentices.

'Engine for growth'

He said winning a share of HS2 money would allow the firm to take on more trainees.

"We can bring in young people and train them, rather than relying on sub-contractors," he said.

A Shropshire timber firm specialising in acoustic fencing, which deadens sound around motorways and railways, went to the conference to see if its product could be used on the HS2 line.

A spokesperson for Charles Ransford and Sons, from Bishop's Castle, said big contracts like HS2 were "important for the company", although it did not rely on them.

It has already done work for the London Gateway and Nottingham tram projects.

HS2 Ltd said that £10bn worth of "supply chain contacts" were on offer.

Technical director Beth West said: "[These will] act as an engine for economic growth through regeneration around the new stations, job creation and the multi-billion pound supply chain."

Paul Fellows, from Techniswage Ltd, knows first hand the benefit of winning a high-profile contract.

The firm built part of the Olympic flame cauldrons used in London 2012.

"It gives your company the launch pad to and to gives your customers more confidence in what you do," he said.

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